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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a California-based interagency program that combines mental health, educational, and probation services in an effort to reduce juvenile recidivism. The program provides interagency services at three therapeutic high schools and one juvenile facility with the goal of keeping minors at home and thereby reducing recidivism by keeping them out of restrictive facilities. After six years of implementation, the program has served a total of 1,507 juvenile wards at the interagency community schools and juvenile facility. The sites served about 300 juvenile wards in fiscal year 1995-96. A study that evaluated the effectiveness of the interagency programs in reducing juvenile recidivism indicates: (1) the interagency program has been effective in reducing the number of felony offenses for wards one year after services as compared to their criminal activity the year before such services; and (2) the number of felony offenses committed by wards significantly declined one year after services as compared to felony offenses of comparison group samples. (CR)

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Introduction

Riverside County's interagency program combines mental health, educational, and probation services in an effort to reduce juvenile recidivism. The program provides interagency services at three therapeutic high schools (12th Street, Perris, and Indio Community Schools) and one juvenile facility (Van Horn Youth Center) with the goal of keeping minors at home, and thereby reducing recidivism by keeping them out of restrictive facilities (e.g., group homes, juvenile hall, California Youth Authority).

Riverside County's interagency services began in FY 1989-90 under Assembly Bill 377 (AB 377) as part of the California System of Care (SOC) model first developed in Ventura County in FY 1984-85. After six years of AB 377 implementation (FY 1989-90 through FY 1994-95), Riverside County has served a total of 1,507 juvenile wards at the interagency community schools and juvenile facility. The sites currently are serving about 300 juvenile wards in FY 1995-96.

As a requirement of AB 377, the Riverside County Mental Health Department annually evaluates the effectiveness of interagency services in reducing recidivism among juvenile court wards. Previous evaluation found that the number of felony and misdemeanor offenses significantly decreased for wards one year after AB 377 services compared to their criminal activity the year before such services (within program outcomes). The number of felony offenses also declined compared with comparison group samples (between group samples).

Riverside County's interagency program for juvenile offenders is representative of the System of Care model being implemented in 19 other California counties. The goal of the state's Department of Mental Health is to establish System of Care programs in all 56 California counties and

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thereby replicate statewide the positive recidivism findings that have been reported in Riverside County.

After six years of interagency cooperation between the County Office of Education, the County Department of Probation, and the County Department of Mental Health, Riverside County reports two key outcomes with implications for reducing juvenile crime in California's counties:

- The total number of felony and misdemeanor offenses significantly decreases for juveniles one year after attending an interagency school/facility compared to their criminal activity the year before being assigned to program (within program outcomes).
- Juveniles are rearrested less often for felony and misdemeanor offenses one year after attending an interagency school/ facility compared with youths who attend non-therapeutic, non-interagency sites (between program outcomes).

Method

A pre-treatment and post-treatment design was used to evaluate the effectiveness of interagency programs in reducing juvenile recidivism. Juvenile recidivism was measured one year before receiving AB 377 services and one year after receiving such services. Four studies (FY 1990-91, FY 1991-92, FY 1992-93, and FY 1993-94) were conducted that employed the one year pre-treatment and one year post-treatment design. A fifth study was conducted (FY 1994-95) that employed a two-year pre-treatment and two-year post-treatment design. Comparison groups were used for the 1990-91, 1992-93, and 1993-94 studies to establish a non-treatment recidivism baseline.

The Riverside County Office of Education, the County Department of Probation, and the County Department of Mental Health provided collaborative educational, probational, and therapeutic services to wards at the interagency high schools and juvenile facility. Wards at the comparison sites received joint educational and probational services, but did not receive mental health services.

Sites

Samples were selected from four interagency sites (Van Horn Youth Center, 12th Street Community School, Perris Community School, and Indio Community School). Samples were also selected from two pre-AB 377 sites (Van Horn and Perris) and from a non-AB 377 community school (Jurupa) to serve as comparison groups. Juvenile wards who were discharged from the four AB 377 sites and who had at least two weeks of interagency services were randomly selected for inclusion in the studies. For the comparison group samples, juvenile wards who were discharged from Jurupa or a pre-AB 377 program and had attended that school for at least two weeks were randomly selected for the

school for at least two weeks were randomly selected for the studies. Altogether, 239 wards receiving AB 377 services were randomly selected for the five recidivism studies; 71 wards were selected from the comparison groups.

Arrest and disposition records were examined for juvenile wards in the four interagency samples and the comparison group samples. These records were collected from official court and probation department documents. The number of sustained offenses by wards (i.e., felonies, misdemeanors, and probation violations) before entry into an AB 377 interagency program was compared with the number of sustained offenses after their exit from the program. The same information was collected for the pre-AB 377 and non-AB 377 comparison groups.

Analysis

Both inferential and descriptive statistical were used to analyze recidivism outcomes. Paired t-tests and t-tests for independent samples were used to measure recidivism before and after interagency intervention. The data is currently also being reanalyzed using a 2 x 2 (Condition x Time) repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). In addition, the effect sizes (also known as program or clinical effectiveness) corresponding to the inferential statistics were also reported. Two types of significance testing were thus reported: statistical significance and clinical significance (effect size).

An effect size is a statistical measure of program effectiveness that compares the degree of a program's effectiveness against a baseline or comparison group. A program can have a result that is simultaneously statistically non-significant and clinically significant. One may infer statistical significance from a clinically significant outcome; that is, a clinically significant outcome denotes a statistically significant outcome (Cohen, 1988; Thompson, 1993).

Results

Overall, findings suggest that AB 377 has been effective in reducing the number of felony offenses committed by wards. The number of felony offenses committed by wards at Van Horn and the three community schools significantly declined one year after AB 377 services compared to felony offenses committed one year before such services

($t = 5.40$, $df = 121$, $p < .001$). The number of felony offenses also declined compared to the comparison group samples. When compared to a pre-treatment comparison sample, the number of felony offenses committed by wards significantly declined at Van Horn one year after AB 377 services compared to felony offenses committed one year before such services ($t = 2.03$, $df = 59$, $p < .05$; see Figure 1). The decline of felonies from pre-treatment to post-treatment approached significance for wards at the three community

approached significance for wards at the three community schools ($t = 1.72$, $df = 203$, $p < .09$) when compared with the non-AB 377 samples (see Figure 2).

The differences in felony offenses between the AB 377 sites and the comparison samples were all clinically significant. Based upon effect size analyses, 44% of the wards from the community schools were likely to commit a felony after AB 377 services compared with 56% of minors from the comparison groups; 37% of the wards from Van Horn were likely to commit a felony after services compared with 63% of wards from the comparison group. Employing a measure of effectiveness (Rosenthal, 1984; Rosenthal & Rubin, 1982), the AB 377 interagency program was 12% more effective in reducing felonies at the community schools than were the comparison programs; it was also 26% more effective at reducing felonies at Van Horn than the comparison group.

The effect size difference for the community school wards relative to the comparison group was .25 standard deviations, felony recidivism was thus reduced by a quarter standard deviation. The effect size difference for the Van Horn wards relative to the comparison group was .53 standard deviations, felony recidivism was thus reduced by more than half a standard deviation. Employing Cohen's (1988) measure of effect size rubric, the community school and Van Horn effect sizes represent small and medium effect sizes, respectively.

The therapeutic interagency programs were therefore (clinically) effective in reducing felony recidivism. The (clinical) effectiveness of the AB 377 community schools and Van Horn in reducing recidivism compares favorably with the success rates (effect sizes) reported in 200 recidivism studies reviewed by Lipsey & Wilson (1992) that show that between 43% to 45% of juvenile wards were likely to reoffend after intervention services compared to 54% to 57% of minors in programs without intervention services.

The fifth study that employed a two-year post-treatment design showed a decline over time in juvenile recidivism (see Figure 3) based on descriptive statistics (inferential statistics have not yet been conducted). This study also showed that juveniles who previously reoffended were likely to reoffend within the first three to six months after receiving interagency System of Care services (see Figure 4). Wards who did not reoffend one year after services were likely not to reoffend during the second year after services.

Discussion

California's System of Care as implemented in Riverside County is helping deter juveniles from committing additional crimes. Riverside County's interagency program for juvenile offenders is similar to a model that is also in

place in 19 other California counties. San Mateo, Santa Cruz, and Ventura counties have also reported that juvenile wards commit fewer felonies and misdemeanor crimes one year after their AB 377 System of Care services compared to their criminal activity the year before such services.

The goal of California's Department of Mental Health is to establish system of care programs in all 56 counties and thereby replicate positive recidivism findings statewide. The positive recidivism outcomes in Riverside County show that the interagency System of Care approach offers other counties in California an effective model for reducing juvenile criminal activity. John Ryan, Riverside County Director of Mental Health and past President of the California Mental Health Director's Association, stresses that "We have shown through research the effectiveness of our collaborative work with juvenile offenders. We have also shown that an interagency approach is more effective when working with juvenile offenders than either mental health or probation trying to work alone."

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